



# John Nygren

WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ 89<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**HOPE Agenda Testimony  
State Rep. John Nygren  
October 13, 2015**

Thank you Chair Vukmir and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services for holding a public hearing on Senate Bills 268, 271, and 272.

Last year, my colleagues in the legislature and I passed a package of seven bills aimed at combating our state's heroin epidemic. We called this package the Heroin, Opiate Prevention and Education – or HOPE -- Agenda. With unanimous bipartisan support and Governor Walker's signature, we successfully laid a foundation to fight heroin and opiate addiction in Wisconsin.

This session, our goal is to address what many people believe to be the root of our state's heroin problem: prescription drug abuse and addiction. Studies show that, in many cases, heroin addiction begins with an addiction to prescription painkillers. Whether these medications are obtained legally or not, we need to do our best to curtail the illegal use of these dangerous substances. It is for this reason that I am offering additional HOPE Agenda bills that are aimed at fighting prescription drug abuse in Wisconsin.

These proposals focus on our state's prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP), methadone clinics, and pain clinics. The goal of these bills is to stop the abuse of prescription medications before it begins; these proposals will help doctors and pharmacists stay on top of their prescribing and dispensing practices, identify patients who attempt to "doctor shop," and ultimately reduce the number of Wisconsinites who become addicted to prescription opiates.

It's important to note that these proposals won't prevent the legitimate use of prescription medications. Instead, these proposals help prescribers and dispensers collect data in order to better identify instances of scheduled drug abuse. I'm proud that we're taking steps in the right direction to fight Wisconsin's heroin and opiate epidemic, and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues, the medical community, law enforcement, and advocacy groups on this effort.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before your committee today on these important pieces of legislation and welcome any questions you may have at this time.

# Alberta Darling

## Wisconsin State Senator

Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

### Continuing the HOPE Agenda: Testimony on Senate Bills 271 and 272 Senate Committee on Health and Human Services October 13, 2015

Thank you Chair Vukmir and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services for your willingness to continue our bipartisan effort to confront Wisconsin's heroin epidemic. With the help of this Committee, the Legislature unanimously passed seven bills last session that are the cornerstone of our HOPE agenda. Representative Nygren is the driving force behind these bills and their attempt to curb one of the root causes of heroin addiction – prescription drug abuse. I would like to thank my friend Rep. Nygren for his leadership.

As you may already know, heroin addictions often begin with prescription drugs administered for legitimate medical reasons. Many addicted individuals turn to heroin when the prescription drugs become too complicated to obtain or too expensive. The two bills I co-authored will curtail the abuse of prescription drugs with the hope that fewer people will become addicted.

I am proud to co-author Senate Bills 271 and 272. Senate Bill 271 attempts to acquire more information on methadone clinics around the state. Methadone is itself a prescription drug that can be used to combat narcotic drug addiction by reducing the withdrawal symptoms. Clinics are located throughout the state, are for-profit, and receive Medicaid reimbursement. SB 271 simply asks methadone clinics to gather data that public health experts and treatment professionals would find useful in studying and analyzing trends in the epidemic and using that data to find new ways to combat addiction. The data collected would include the treatment program's plan for tapering individuals off of methadone, the number of doses that individuals carry out of the facility, the ratio of treatment program staff, the number of individuals who are receiving behavioral health services in conjunction with the methadone treatment, and the average mileage that an individual has to travel to receive the treatment. The data would be provided to DHS in a way that would ensure privacy for individuals receiving treatment. Finally, the bill asks health care providers at methadone clinics to review the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program for other methadone or pain medication use.

Senate Bill 272 preempts the possibility of "pill mills" in Wisconsin. It would give the Department of Health Services oversight over the operation of pain management clinics across the state. These clinics serve a role in our health care system but can sometimes be operated by unsavory characters that care more about their bottom-line than the well-being of their patients. This bill helps to balance the safety of our citizens while preserving an open marketplace for clinics that serve a real need for those in chronic pain.

The medical community in Wisconsin is second to none. I stand in awe of the superb care they give to Wisconsinites and I have no interest in curtailing the operations of those who uphold their oath. These bills will have very little impact on these honest professionals.

I urge the Committee to support the continuation of the HOPE agenda today. In doing so, I want to emphasize that every precaution has been taken to ensure that individuals who need these medications will not be prohibited from obtaining them. We have just begun to combat prescription drug abuse in our state. It is my strong belief – that together – we can reduce the number of Wisconsinites who are swept up in this tragic epidemic.



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**PREPARED TESTIMONY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL BRAD D. SCHIMEL**  
Support for Senate Bill 268, Senate Bill 271, and Senate Bill 272  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Tuesday, October 13, 2015

Good morning Madame Chairwoman and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on these three important bills: SB 268, SB 271, and SB 272.

I am Wisconsin Attorney General Brad Schimel. Prior to becoming Attorney General, I served 25 years in the Waukesha County DA's Office. I am here today, not only in my official capacity as the leader of the Wisconsin Department of Justice, but as a concerned father, uncle, and community member.

Over the last decade, Wisconsin has seen a dramatic increase in the illegal use of opiates, both heroin and prescription painkillers. The National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health found that 4.3% of Wisconsin adults abuse opiates in some manner. That represents more than 163,000 people right here in our state!

Those members of the legislature who were serving last session know how much of an impact opiates have had on Wisconsinites in all corners of the state and I thank you again for unanimously passing the H.O.P.E. legislation. In recent years, the Wisconsin Department of Justice and the Wisconsin State Legislature have together made great progress in expanding availability and training for Narcan use, organizing drug take back days, enacting Good Samaritan laws, and encouraging and funding expansion of treatment courts.

These have been very important first steps in addressing our state's devastating opiate epidemic. However, rates of addiction and number of deaths are still on the rise in Wisconsin. Looking back to 2000, we saw opiate overdose deaths more than quadruple, and in the past decade, they increased by more than 250%. Just last month, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services released additional data that show that a drug overdose is now the leading cause of accidental death in Wisconsin. More than from motor vehicle crashes, breast cancer, colon cancer,

influenza, or HIV.

If we saw deaths from any of those causes rise so dramatically, we would do something about it. Perhaps even things that might sound a bit crazy.

Beyond the deaths and destruction directly caused by abuse of opiates, it is also driving dramatic increases in virtually every other type of crime as addicts desperately try to find ways to support their habit: theft, burglary, robbery, identity theft, prostitution and opiates are even often linked to human trafficking.

In fact, Wisconsin is now number two in the nation for pharmacy robberies nationwide. Not per capita. In raw numbers. We have more than California, New York, Florida or Texas. The only other state ahead of us is Indiana, another wholesome Midwestern state.

This addiction is affecting every community in Wisconsin; rural, suburban and urban. There has, rightly, been a great deal of concern in Wisconsin about heroin in our state, but prescription painkillers play a role in the deaths of more people than heroin and cocaine combined.

Even more shocking, nearly 4 of 5 heroin addicts started by first becoming addicted to prescription painkillers. Without prescription opiate abuse, we might not be talking about heroin at all.

This presents us with a great opportunity. Heroin is in our state because there is a tremendous demand for it. The numbers demonstrate, though, that if we can reduce the abuse of prescription opiates, we can greatly reduce the demand for heroin. We cannot continue to allow these potentially dangerous drugs to be diverted for abuse. I'm glad to see the Wisconsin State Legislature, under Representative Nygren's leadership, address the challenges of prescription drug diversion and abuse with these four new laws. These pieces of legislation will help put Wisconsin on the right track.

### **Senate Bill 268**

Under current Wisconsin law, pharmacists have up to seven days to report prescriptions being filled, giving addicts the ability to "doctor shop" before the prior prescription shows up on the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, or PDMP, site. Law enforcement and the medical community have seen countless addicts game the system by obtaining prescription opiates from several different doctors within a couple days, without any of the doctors able to know that the patient is receiving prescriptions from other prescribers.

Senate Bill 268, and its companion, AB 364, will bring our state's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program or PDMP in line with many neighboring states, by requiring

pharmacists to report prescriptions within 24 hours. This will help prevent improper access to potentially deadly drugs.

### **Senate Bill 272**

In Wisconsin, certain types of “pain clinics,” institutions that prescribe highly addictive prescription painkillers, often without demonstrable patient need, have little supervision. Senate Bill 272, and its companion, AB 366, will put safeguards in place to have additional oversight by the Department of Health Services and will ensure proper guidelines are in place and strictly adhered to.

### **Senate Bill 271**

Similarly, Methadone Clinics operating in our state may provide effective treatment to some patients, but little information is collected and shared with authorities, making a full assessment of the clinics’ effectiveness in helping addicts stay sober essentially impossible. Senate Bill 271, and its companion, AB 367, will allow the Department of Health Services to collect data from methadone clinics and requires an annual report to ensure it is being used in an effective way.

### **Conclusion**

The Wisconsin Department of Justice and law enforcement statewide will continue our enforcement efforts. In fact, we have ramped them up, but we cannot arrest our way out of this public health crisis. The Department of Health Services and treatment community will also not be able to address the need to treat tens of thousands of people addicted to opiates. The resources are simply not adequate enough to address the need. These efforts need to be combined with pervasive and powerful prevention efforts. To that end, the Wisconsin Department of Justice and Department of Health Services have kicked off a large-scale prevention campaign to address prescription painkiller abuse. The Wisconsin Hospital Association, the Wisconsin Dental Association, the Wisconsin Medical Society, the Wisconsin Pharmacy Society, and other medical providers have partnered with us to develop the important message presented by this campaign and have also taken steps to educate their members on the dangers of opiate abuse. I am thrilled that the Wisconsin State Legislature is continues to support these efforts to prevent additional Wisconsinites from being harmed by abuse of these drugs which are demonstrated to be very dangerous when used improperly.

Thank you for allowing me the time today to address this body. I am happy to take questions.